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INFO RUCNCLS/ALL SOUTH AND CENTRAL ASIA COLLECTIVE
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RUCNIRA/IRAN COLLECTIVE
RUEHAK/AMEMBASSY ANKARA 5511
RUEHDE/AMCONSUL DUBAI 0108
RUEHIT/AMCONSUL ISTANBUL 3754
RHMCSUU/CDR USCENCOM MACDILL AFB FL
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ASHGABAT 000993

SIPDIS

STATE FOR NEA/IR AND SCA/CEN

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TAGS: [IR](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [TX](#)

SUBJECT: IRAN/TURKMENISTAN: SCHOLAR PREDICTS MORE OF THE
SAME DURING SECOND AHMADINEJAD TERM

REF: ASHGABAT 204

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Classified By: DCM Sylvia Reed Curran. Reasons 1.4(b) and (d).

11. (C) In a conversation this week with Iran Watcher, Ghandeem Gurbanov, Turkmenistan's most prominent Farsi language scholar, who currently teaches at the Iranian Embassy's Cultural Center in Ashgabat, said that Iranians residing in Turkmenistan voted nearly unanimously for and continue to support Mousavi. They are "heartbroken," he said, at the way they believe the outcome of Iran's presidential election was stage-managed in June. (NOTE: Gurbanov, incidentally, had expressed serious concerns to us last February that Iran's election would be engineered to ensure a conservative victory. (Reftel). END NOTE.)

AHMADINEJAD'S TERM MAY NOT LAST ALL FOUR YEARS

12. (C) Gurbanov said that the Iranians he knows do not expect Ahmadinejad to serve a full four-year term, and that his tenure will be curtailed by either the death of Supreme Leader Khamenei (reported to be seriously ill with cancer), and/or outright removal from office. Gurbanov himself said that Khamenei's public rebuff of Ahmadinejad's attempt to kiss his hand during the August 3 endorsement ceremony as significant and further evidence of his loss of favor with the Supreme Leader. He said that many Iranians believe that Rafsanjani is a likely successor to Khamenei as Supreme Leader, but that reforms are impossible under an Ahmadinejad presidency and while Khamenei remains at the top. He further opined that a second Ahmadinejad term does not augur well for the possibility of rapprochement between the U.S. and Iran, particularly as the Supreme Leader, in his view, has made it clear that he does not favor improved relations with the West. He also cited Iran's arrest of three American hikers in the area of Kurdistan as indicative of a harder-line stance vis-a-vis the United States.

RAFSANJANI: "SMART, THOUGHTFUL AND PRACTICAL"

13. (C) Gurbanov, who served as late Turkmen president Niyazov's interpreter in official meetings in both Ashgabat

and Tehran with presidents Rafsanjani and Khatami, said he had opportunity to observe Rafsanjani on a number of occasions, and found him "extremely sharp, thoughtful, and practical." In his interactions with the Turkmen president, he was always a "man of few words," he said, and always chose his words carefully.

IRANIAN AND TURKMEN PEOPLE: A SOURING OF RELATIONS

4.(C) Contrasting it with the relatively good relations that the Turkmen and Iranian governments currently enjoy, as well as the significant volume of natural gas that Iran imports from Turkmenistan, Gurbanov described how soon after Iranian merchants and others had arrived en masse in Turkmenistan in the early 1990's to open businesses, Turkmen began to see them as "opportunists" and unscrupulous in their business dealings. He cited an example from 1993 where an Iranian merchant, reportedly also a mullah who wore the turban and robe customary of Shia clergy, purchased \$180,000 of Russian iron from a Turkmen firm. The firm, out of respect for the "mullah's" religious affiliation, did not require payment upon delivery of the shipment. The "mullah" thereafter reportedly absconded and never paid the Turkmen. (Gurbanov was involved in translation of the legal documents in the case later filed with the Iranian Embassy in Ashgabat.) In addition, a scandal occurred in the mid 1990's surrounding the arrest in Iran of about sixty Turkmen women alleged to have traveled there to work in the sex industry or to smuggle drugs. All of the Turkmen women were eventually released, but whereas travel between the two countries had been relatively free prior to the incident, both sides now impose a strict visa regime on nationals of the other, and Turkmen women under 35 cannot travel to Iran unless accompanied by a male family member.

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15. (C) COMMENT: Although he is more a linguistic scholar than anything else, Gurbanov's 40 years of contact with Iranians gives him increased understanding and a unique perspective among Turkmen of his country's neighbor to the south. His instincts vis-a-vis Iran are unfailingly on target. No meeting with him is complete without his sharing with his interlocutor yet another volume of Persian poetry (his true passion) or a book of Turkmen and Persian proverbs. END COMMENT.
MILES